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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 003115

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ET](#) [SO](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PARLIAMENT CONSIDERS AUTHORIZATION OF  
WAR ON CIC

REF: ADDIS ABABA 2911

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR KEVIN SULLIVAN FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) A  
ND (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In a remarkable session on Nov. 23, Prime Minister Meles asked Parliament to approve a resolution stating Ethiopia's desire for peaceful relations with Somalia, but authorizing "any measures necessary" to respond to the Council of Islamic Court's (CIC) declared jihad against Ethiopia. He argued that three measures taken by the extremists -- the declaration of the jihad, the call for uniting Somali populations in the Horn in a "Greater Somalia" and direct support for insurgents in Ethiopia -- posed a "clear and present danger" to Ethiopia. The PM went even further, claiming that CIC support for infiltrating (ONLF and OLF) insurgents into Ethiopia constituted an attack on the country. Any Ethiopian military action would be legitimate self-defense, rather than a preemptive attack, he concluded. Oromo opposition leader Bulcha Demeksa pointed out the potential for an Ethiopian invasion of Somalia to result in international condemnation, as well as a reduction in needed development assistance. Meles countered that not all countries would condemn Ethiopia, and that in any case the country would have to pay whatever price was necessary to defend itself. Senior opposition figure Beyene Petros worried that the proposed resolution would be misinterpreted as a declaration of war on Somalia, to which Meles replied that he hoped the resolution would strengthen the GOE's hand in negotiations to avert armed conflict. Beyene stated that his party did not want to be responsible for a divided vote on an issue of national security and urged Meles to consider compromise language for the resolution. In a stunning move, Meles -- whose ruling EPRDF has a super-majority of votes in Parliament -- thanked Beyene for his non-partisan approach and agreed on the spot to consultations with party leaders on compromise language. The chamber burst into spontaneous applause, with both opposition and ruling party MPs joining in. The result of the consultations is still unknown.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY COMMENT: The draft resolution further confirms the GOE's earnest preparations for war with the CIC -- unless Ethiopia's clear willingness to military force is sufficient to force CIC concessions in negotiations. At the same time, debate of the issue put Ethiopia's first multi-party Parliament and its democratic culture to the test. The opposition showed unusual coherence and effectiveness in challenging Meles, expressing the uneasiness many Ethiopians feel about the impending conflict, but also

reflecting the belief of many that the country does indeed face a threat in the CIC and must prepare to defend itself. A "vanguard party" with Marxist roots, the EPRDF is little accustomed to prior consultations with the opposition, particularly on grave issues of national security. The PM's willingness to grasp Beyene's outstretched hand in such a public setting struck many as a significant development in Ethiopia's political evolution. End Comment and Summary.

13. (U) The Ethiopian Parliament met on Nov. 23 to hear PM Meles engage in the first open "question time" as provided for in newly-adopted Parliamentary rules of procedure, and to consider a draft GOE resolution authorizing (implicitly) the use of force in Somalia. Pol/Econ Counselor joined other diplomats in the gallery to observe what proved to be a remarkable session.

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QUESTION TIME: INTER-FAITH CLASHES, INFLATION AND SOMALIA  
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14. (U) Meles addressed questions submitted in advance by both opposition and ruling party MPs. (When opposition leader Bulcha Demeksa of the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM) asked why there were not more questions, the Speaker responded that only four had been submitted.) The first question concerned the GOE's response to widespread Muslim-Christian clashes in southwestern Oromiya region in September. Meles conveyed results from the authorities' investigation of the incidents, which found that Muslim "Hawarge" extremists had exploited a deadly but limited incident arising out of a Christian bonfire celebration to launch a campaign of church burnings, killings and forced

ADDIS ABAB 00003115 002 OF 004

conversions. The PM reported that 13 Christians and 6 Muslims had been killed, and 600 homes and 5 churches burned.

Six Protestant churches had been converted to mosques. Federal police had been deployed to assist overwhelmed local authorities. Meles emphasized that recently-installed phone lines in the area had been used effectively by extremists to spread misinformation and mayhem rapidly. Federal police had been deployed to assist overwhelmed local authorities. Several hundred people had been arrested in connection with the violence, Meles said, thanks in large part to help from chastened community leaders. A joint interfaith commission was now working to prevent further outbreaks. The PM mentioned that some less principled religious leaders on both sides were disseminating DVD's with footage of the violence in order to propagate the unrest in Addis Ababa and other places. He urged community leaders and parents to join the GOE in promoting a return to Ethiopia's tradition religious tolerance and peace.

15. (SBU) In response to a question, the PM also returned to a topic he has dealt with in other recent Parliamentary debates: rising prices on consumer staples. Meles acknowledged once again that rising prices for grain and other food were making life difficult, especially for the urban population and pastoralists. The PM urged MPs not to react emotionally to the problem, but rather look at the root causes for inflation. He claimed that the underlying problem was the increasing orientation of farmers toward cash crops for export and away from food production for internal use. This had both decreased the supply of grain somewhat and increased the number of consumers for grain. He also acknowledged that marketing problems had prevented farmers from receiving the proper incentives to increase food production, but said the GOE would introduce measures to address those problems in the coming months. The ongoing harvest would also further reduce prices, which had already begun to drop. The PM ruled out the use of subsidies of price controls to deal with inflation and assured MPs that markets would adjust on their own to the gap between supply and demand. (COMMENT: It is interesting to note that the ruling EPRDF, often accused of lingering Marxism on economic

policy, remains staunchly opposed to distortionary food subsidies often employed by more populist governments. END COMMENT.)

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SOMALIA: WE ARE ALREADY UNDER ATTACK  
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¶6. (U) PM Meles laid out to Parliament the GOE's stark view of the situation in Somalia. He claimed that while the GOE had no problem with Somalia per se, nor even with the CIC as a whole, the CIC was now being led by extremist elements who constituted a "clear and present danger" to Ethiopia. Meles outlined three measures which he claimed constituted a "direct attack" on Ethiopia by the CIC:

- A public declaration of Jihad against Ethiopia;
- A public declaration of the CIC's intent to unify "Greater Somalia," including portions of Ethiopia; and
- Arming, training and transporting violent insurgents (OLF and ONLF) into Ethiopia. Meles also noted the close coordination between the CIC and the Eritrean Government with the common goal of overthrowing the EPRDF.

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AUTHORIZATION FOR "ALL MEASURES NECESSARY"  
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¶7. (U) In order to confront the situation, Meles discussed GOE efforts to engage the CIC in negotiations on two occasions to obtain a commitment to end the group's threats against Ethiopia and change its policies. These attempts had been rebuffed. The PM argued that the GOE had a right to defend itself and had been preparing to do so. The GOE's first preference was still negotiation -- an option for which there was still time -- but stated that "we can't avoid the problem. If peace is not possible, based on international law we will take steps commensurate with the present danger." He asked that the Parliament support this course of action. EPRDF Whip Shiferaw Jarso presented the GOE's proposed resolution, which declared Ethiopia's desire for peaceful

ADDIS ABAB 00003115 003 OF 004

relations with Somalia, but reiterated the hostile actions taken by the CIC previously mentioned by the Prime Minister. It highlighted the "clear and present danger" the CIC represented to Ethiopian sovereignty and expressed Parliament's support for the GOE in taking "all measures deemed necessary" to deal with the threat.

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OPPOSITION QUESTION NEED FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION  
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¶8. (U) Several members of the opposition raised their hands to object to the tabling of the resolution without adequate discussion. Beyene Petros of the UEDF took the floor to warn that "hostile countries might interpret this resolution as a declaration of war." He supported the GOE's efforts to prepare for war and urged the Council of Ministers to continue its efforts in this regard. Beyene argued that it was unhelpful for Parliament to pass a measure without having done its own investigation into the threat. He concluded that, "we have no intention to deny the GOE support on this issue, since this is a matter of national security, but we must be careful how our actions are interpreted." Bulcha Demeksa of the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement (OFDM) objected to authorizing what he called a "preemptive strike" against the CIC because it would be in contravention of international law. Such illegal action could isolate Ethiopia and make the country vulnerable to reductions in badly-needed assistance. Bulcha argued that the GOE should prepare militarily, but respond to CIC aggression only when its forces crossed into Ethiopian territory. "The first to shoot will be a pariah," he concluded.

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MELES: WE MUST SHOW CIC THAT WE ARE WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE  
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¶9. (U) Meles first thanked opposition speakers for treating the issue of Somalia as a national, rather than a partisan, matter. He reiterated, however, that the CIC had already declared war on Ethiopia and "taken measures against us." He emphasized in particular the CIC's assistance to Ethiopian insurgent groups in infiltrating Ethiopian territory. An attack had taken place against the country, Meles insisted, but the GOE had reacted with restraint so far in order to seek a peaceful solution. There had been no rush to war. Meles denied that the proposed resolution was a declaration of war, and summarized the message of the measure as follows: 1) we want the problem with the CIC solved peacefully; but 2) an attack has already occurred, and the situation could reach a point where it requires a response; we are ready to respond. The PM argued that the resolution would strengthen the GOE's hand in negotiations because it would counter two major misperceptions among CIC leaders. The first was that the GOE would not take military action against the CIC without international backing. "They need to see that we can and will do this," Meles said. The second misperception was that a GOE declared of war on Somalia would provoke an internal political crisis in Ethiopia. This was also false, the PM asserted. Thus by authorizing the executive to act rapidly when and if the situation becomes intolerable, Parliament would actually be strengthening the GOE's hand to make peace.

¶10. (SBU) The PM dwelt for some time on the matter of international support for Ethiopian intervention. He made a careful distinction between the problem among Somalis (i.e. the TFG and the CIC), which Somalis alone would have to resolve, and problems between the CIC and Ethiopia, which the GOE would have to deal with itself. Concerning relations among Somalis, the GOE supported the positions of the African Union, IGAD and the rest of the international community in favor of dialogue. On this point, the GOE would not be isolated. On the second point, Meles said, the international community had been understandably less resolute. After all, the CIC had not declared jihad against the United Nations, but against Ethiopia. For this reason, the GOE could not refrain from defending itself while waiting for the approval of others who were not facing the brunt of the CIC. The PM asserted that the GOE would follow the established international principle that those who are attacked can take commensurate measures in their own defense. "Not all

ADDIS ABAB 00003115 004 OF 004

countries will support us, since countries respond to their own interests" Meles said, but pledged to seek international support for Ethiopia's actions. In any case, the GOE would have to pay the price to defend the country.

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REACHING ACROSS THE AISLE?  
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¶11. (SBU) After Meles' rebuttal of opposition objections, Beyene Petros told Parliament that his party did not wish to be responsible for a divided vote on such a grave issue. He urged PM Meles to consider compromise language for the resolution. In a stunning move, Meles -- whose ruling EPRDF has a super-majority of votes in Parliament -- thanked Beyene for his non-partisan approach and agreed on the spot to consultations with party leaders on compromise language. The entire chamber burst into spontaneous applause, with both opposition and ruling party MPs joining in. Meles instructed party representatives to consult in a private meeting and then report back with the results of their work. Parliament then voted nearly unanimously in favor of a resolution in favor of the consultations.

¶12. (C) Pol/Econ Counselor spoke privately to Beyene Petros

on Nov. 27 to check on the progress of talks on the resolution. Beyene said that his UEDF had worked much of the weekend to develop alternate language to tone down the resolution. He said his party objected to Parliament authorizing "any measures necessary," since the Council of Ministers was already charged with the defense of the country, as well as to language on support for insurgent groups, which some of his members (presumably the Oromo National Congress) felt could justify later GOE measures against them. Beyene said that these edits had been rejected by EPRDF Shiferaw, but noted with some trepidation that the PM himself had summoned Beyene for a meeting on Nov. 28 to discuss the issue. He expressed concerns that too much compromise with the GOE could split his party.

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COMMENT: POTENTIAL CONFLICT PUTS DEMOCRACY TO THE TEST  
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¶13. (C) The draft resolution further confirms the GOE's earnest preparations for war with the CIC -- unless Ethiopia's clear willingness to military force is sufficient to force CIC concessions in negotiations. At the same time, debate of the issue put Ethiopia's first multi-party Parliament and its democratic culture to the test. The opposition showed unusual coherence and effectiveness in challenging Meles. A "vanguard party" with Marxist roots, the EPRDF is little accustomed to prior consultations with the opposition, particularly on grave issues of national security. The PM's willingness to grasp Beyene's outstretched hand in such a public setting was a significant step forward in democratic politics. It remains to be seen how much the GOE and the opposition will be prepared to compromise to preserve national unity in the face of an external threat. The opposition expressed the uneasiness many Ethiopians feel about the impending conflict, but also reflected the belief of many that the country does indeed face a threat in the CIC and must prepare to defend itself.  
End Comment.  
YAMAMOTO